United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lily Malnik
February 27, 1992
RG-50.042*0020

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Lily Malnik, conducted on February 27, 1992 in Highland Beach, Florida on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

LILY MALNIK
February 27, 1992

Beep.

I want you to tell me the story of how you ended up working for the factory owner, and giving a manicure to the SS, so, you probably want to tell that you were in hiding in the country with your aunt and uncle.

I'm sorry, something just came out before we added our stock.

Is it essential?

I'm going to start while you guys are slating.

Beep.

I want you to tell the story of how you ended up working for the factory owner, and giving a manicure to the SS. I want you to give sort of a one-liner context, maybe, my brother had mother had already been taken, and I was in hiding

with my...uh huh. Okay. Uh, my family was taken already while I was convalescent in, in my aunt and uncles' home after uh, co-uh, ton-uh-tonsillitis operation, and uh, I had nobody but my aunt and uncle, and I stayed with them, and I acquainted people that lived next door to us, which uh, liked me very much, and they suggested that I should come and work for them while we were in hiding, and nobody will know that I am Jewish, and um, the Germans, when they invaded Belgium, took his factory over, so uh, I was doing camouflage work in the factory, and the owner was very, very nice to me and was trying to help me so that we could stay in the apt and uh and, and live there and a little bit of money I made there, I helped my aunt and uncle to buy groceries, and um, while I was doing the work, at night, in the evening, there was another neighbor who knew I was Jewish, and he had a beauty shop, and they uh, made connection with this uh, gentleman there, and, uh, asked for me to go and work there, and learn the trade as uh, an apprentice to do manicuring. And, uh, so I was learning the trade in the evenings to be a manicurist. And, in the evening, I would practice on, on the owner of the beauty shop, how to do the nails, and uh, one day, the owner from the factory, told me, uh "Lily, I request uh for you to do something for me. You, don't go to work in

the beauty shop, but come into our apt and help me uh in the kitchen because we are entertaining German people, who uh control the factory, and, I said, "How can I do that?" I said, " They'll know I'm Jewish, and they'll take me away," and he says, "Don't worry, I promise you, you won't come out of the kitchen. I'll come in and I'll give you orders in the kitchen, and you won't have to show yourself over there, and um, please do it," and I, I couldn't refuse the man, he was so nice to me, and he was trying to help me, so I said, "Okay, I will." And I went uh, that night to his house, which was next door to our apt, and uh, and the dinner, everything went very good, and while I was finishing up, he came in, and he says, "Lily, please don't be nervous, but I told him that you were a manicurist, and uh, one of the German officers, uh, would like, uh, are requesting for you to give him a manicure." Well, I almost dropped dead right there because I was so frightened, and for an excuse, I gave, I told him, "I don't have my tools with me, I can't do it, and, and I'm scared, and and I will cut his fingers." So, uh, he says, "Calm down. I have tools, and you'll go there, and uh, you'll give him a manicure." I says, "How can I? I'll, I'll, I'll be uh shaking all over." And, he, he insisted I should do it. And, so, I went in, uh, there was nothing for me else to do. I went in, and um, I spoke very little. I pretended um, I didn't understand what they were saying because they were speaking German in bet-between themselves, and I gave him a manicure, and he gave me a generous tip he had. And how I didn't cut his, his uh, uh fingers, I don't understand to this day because I was a nervous wreck inside of me, and that was one of the m-terrible experiences that uh I had to experience before I even was caught in Belgium.

Tell the story of the tenant, who denounced your aunt and uncle, how they left them, and you say the factory owner had overheard the Germans come to search.

Uh, in that same apt where I lived with my aunt and uncle, one night after work in in the um beauty shop, I came home, and my aunt and uncle were crying and were very upset, and they told me, "Lily, we have to leave." Uh, some neighbors came and told us that uh, the new tenants that moved in uh, we lived in an apt bldg, and we each had apartments, so uh they found out that we were Jewish, and they denounced us, and how it working to them, I don't know to this day, but they knew that that night, the Germans were coming to take us away, so I quick ran over to our next door neighbors, which was my boss from the factory, and I told him, and uh I, I, we were in despair. He says, "Take the keys of the factory. Tell your ma-uh, your aunt and uncle to go and hide there overnight. They can only stay there one night. You come and stay with us in our apt., but tomorrow morning when they leave, they should not come back to the apt, they should go out and find another place and never come back here." So, I went back to my aunt and uncle that evening, and I gave them the keys of the factory. I told my aunt and uncle to take whatever they can with them, and stay in the factory overnight, and leave the next day in the morning, and I went

to sleep over in um, my boss's apartment. Well, it didn't take long, maybe about midnight or 1 o clock, I really don't know what time it was, we heard the trucks come, and uh, the squeaking of the trucks and they stopped, and it so happened that the apt where I slept, the wall of the bedroom was the other side of the apt of our living room from my aunt and uncle. We heard them come up, we heard them go in the apt, we heard their screams and their hollering because they didn't find us. They were very angry and upset. They were throwing the furniture all over the apartment. The walls of the uh bedroom where I was sleeping was vibrating from the, from the uh banging and, and throwing the uh, the furniture around. And then they left. But, before that, the owner was so uh nervous and upset, he ran to the window and uh, he uh looked down, and the wife was so nervous and upset, she grabbed my hand, we were laying in bed, and she said, "Lilly, please Lilly, pray to your God that they shouldn't find us. And other wise they're going to shoot us and they're going to take you away. Please pray to your God, and, and, that your god should hear you, and then she was hollering at her husband to get away from the window because she was afraid that they would see him, and they would then come upstairs, but thank God, nobody saw us, and nobody told that I was there, and they drove off. And this is how they really saved my life, because I wouldn't have been here, because I was able to hide for 2 yrs like that, until uh, my aunt and uncle and I was caught.

Uh, tell me that story how you got picked up.

Well, um, when um, my aunt and uncle were in hiding, they went and found another neighborhood. The neighborhood was not a real good neighborhood. It was well, uh, low uh working people live. And, um, and they took um, one room uh, furnished, and uh, and they stayed in that little room, and uh, I befriended a friend who I worked with in the factory. She was a girl about maybe 2, 3 years older than me, and she liked me very much. When my aunt and uncle moved away from the neighborhood, and I was in despair, I didn't know where to go, and I mentioned it to her, I said, and she knew I was Jewish, so, she says, "Lily, don't worry. I'm going to tell my mother that you're going to come and live with me, with us." I says, "How can I do this? I can't not, I cannot," they were working people, they really, they had no money, and uh, I said, "Your mother is not going to like that. She says, "My mother will, will do it for you." And so she asked her mother, and her mother agreed that I should come and stay with them. So, uh, the money that I was making, I gave to her mother to, for me to help with the room and board, but then naturally I started to worry about my aunt and uncle, and I knew...

We have to reload.

Okay.

Before we do anything, let's get some room tone. That means just be silent....

The following is 30 seconds of room tone with air conditioning, rooftop ventilators are starting now.

End room tone. We're changing film now to Camera Roll 2, Sync take 3 is up.

Beep.

Why don't you pick it up, I think you were

I was, I was nervous, and ,and uh, and worried about my aunt and uncle, and um, I decided one morning on a Sunday, early, that I would go and visit them where they were in hiding. They naturally did not know that I was coming, and I surprised them, and I came to visit them. Towards evening when I wanted to go back to um, the girl where, who invited me to stay with her, my uncle said, "Leah, uh, Lilly, don't go back. Sleep over tonight, and uh, I am worried for you to go through this section because the man that lived around there in that neighborhood, in the evening, it was summertime, and it was very hot, they would sit outside on the curbs of the street, and drink beer, and look at everybody who's wal--and naturally they knew one another, and knew everybody who lived in that neighborhood, so my uncle was worried for me to go back, and he said, "Stay, already here and sleep over." My aunt was very upset. She said, "No, the people who are keeping Lilly will worry where she is, and why she didn't come back. Let her go, and there is no bed here anyhow." So, my uncle wouldn't hear about it, and he says, "I'll make a bed for her on the floor in the kitchen." There was only 2 little rooms, and uh um, so and, so my aunt finally gave in, and I slept over that night, and early in the morning, I don't know what time it was, it was very early, I heard terrible banging at the, uh, at the door where I was sleeping at the head, and I jumped up from the floor, and I looked out the window, and there were the Germans with their rifles up the air, looking at the window, uh, in case somebody was trying to escape, they would shoot you, and I knew right then and there that we were caught, and this is how my aunt and uncle and I were arrested, from um, Jette in Brussels, where I was hiding with my aunt and uncle.

And so then did you get transported right away?

No, uh, they took us by truck from that little um, small apt, and uh, they took us to a jail in

Brussels, which was uh, a lot of different little cells, and they packed us in, in, in each little cell, we were very, very crowded. We couldn't even turn around, we were standing like sardines in that cell. I remember we couldn't breathe. The smell was terrible, and the screams and cries that came from the other uh cells was very uh frightening, and we were very bewildered and exhausted from standing like this all day long, and finally at night, they took us out of those cells, and put us in trucks, and they moved us away, and uh, after we travelled for a while, we arrived in a little town called Malin. Malin, wa-there was a detention place where they gathered all the Jews that they caught from Belgium and they brought them to Malin, and they kept them there until they had enough people for a transport, and when they were ready to have the transport, they sent them away to the concentration camps, so I was in Malin with my aunt and uncle, I would say maybe 6 or 7 weeks, I really have no idea how long I stayed there, it seemed to me a long time, and uh, when we came in, uh, naturally they, uh, right away they said we have to give up all the jewelry and all the money, and all the uh whatever we had personal belongings, and if you don't do it, you will be hurt and you will be punished. And, uh, again we heard screams and cries and carrying on. Some people in other places over there, they, behind doors, they were torturing for information, and um, and we were very, very frightened, and that's how we arrived in Malin, and we stayed there in a big room and um, I found out afterwards that uh, Malin before the war was a, a Cassern??, which um, um, from um, from horses and army, an armory, and that's, that place they uh, they turned it into um, the detention place for the uh Jewish people that they caught, and from there, it was in the early fall, we were transported to um the concentration camp, and we went into cattle wagons, and we did not know where our destination was going to be. And, we left, uh for good, fr-from Belgium. And, I understand that uh, afterwards, that our was the 25th transport, which was the uh, the 2nd last transport that left Belgium, and after that, Belgium was liberated.

Describe the transport and then the arrival part.

The transport was horrible, just terrible, they gave us a ration of bread, and the children got a can of milk, and we were herded in into cattle wagons. The cattle wagon that I ended up with my aunt and uncle was a coal wagon, so the fl-the floor from the cabin was black, and I don't know how many people were in the cattle wagon, we uh, we were herded in with so many people, it was like in that other jail where we couldn't even sit or, or we had to stand up most of the time, and we couldn't move. They gave us 2 buckets on each side of the cattle wagon to uh, to relieve ourselves, and before we knew it, the ca-the the, the uh, the pails were turned over, and we lay like this in that dirt, for, until we arrived into the camp, and uh, we couldn't breathe. There, there, there was no air, there was a small little window with wires that were over the windows so that nobody could escape, and we went that like that for maybe 3 or 4 days, I don't know how many days we went, in

between the, the, the, we were riding, the trains had to stop because the sirens would come on, and uh, and then they wouldn't ride the trains when the sirens were on, and then we would start again, and we, and people were getting very, very restless, and very nervous, and they got upset with one another, because their tension of uh, of uh, of patience was running out, so they started arguing with one another, and uh, and fighting, and there was noise, and all of the sudden, the German put his rifle in, in the window and he was just shooting at, at bland, at people, and then he hollered we should be quiet, and he shot 2 or 3 people that way, and we settled down, naturally, because we were afraid that we were going to get shot. And this is how we arrived. And when we arrived it was dawn, and I understand, the camp was called Birkenau. And in Birkenau, when I arrived, we were so exhausted and so tired. I only had eaten the bread in the, in the train, and my aunt wouldn't let me drink the mild because she thought I should save it for later, but I had to leave all my packages and the milk on the side because they told us to drop all our belongings, and I was so upset that I couldn't drink my milk, I remember, and uh, and then we went into a line, they told us to go into a line, and uh, we were facing Germans. The Germans were everywhere with dogs. The German Shepherd dogs, they were sniffing at us, and , and I heard screams because cert, uh certain dogs would attack people, and I would hear shots, but anyhow, we stayed in line, and as we came closer to the Germans, I saw this tall man, which I didn't know at that time who he was, and he directed us where to go, to the right or to the left. My aunt went to the left, and I had to go to the right. I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to my aunt because I thought she was just going to register us, to give our names and identification, and afterwards I found out, when I went into the camp, that she went to the left, and the left meant crematoria, which meant the ovens, and I was going into the concentration camp. This is how I arrived in Aush--in Bergen-Belsen. No, no, no, no, excuse me, I made a mistake, in Birkenau.

We're almost about to run out. I'll ask you a quick question. Who was the doctor and how did you know who he was?

I was told that the man who directed us from the left to the right, he, with his finger, he went to the right or to the left, and he was Dr. Mengele, and each time I, afterwards, when we saw him, we saw death in front of our eyes, because they called him the angel of death. When we saw him, we, we saw, we saw hell, because we kn--we thought for sure we were going to die right there and then, because he sent everybody to the gas.

(Loud background noise)

I thought that was turned off.

Beep.

Why don't you describe registration. Let's start with Fromm's?? selection, and also give your age at this point in time. Describe registration and then.....

What do you mean by registration.

Going in and getting processed.

Okay, when we um, when we arrived, uh, in Birkenau after we went to the right, they um, took us to, they called in Amplausing, which was the bathhouses, and uh, we stayed there for hours after we showered, and then they cut our hair, and uh, we gave them our name, although it di--that didn't matter, I don't think, and uh, we stayed in the bathhouse for hours when it was freezing. The windows were covered with ice, we couldn't even look out, and we were waiting for our clothes to come back, and uh, and we stayed in a, in a tremendous big room with no heat, and we were wet, and uh, and we waited like that for hours, and finally when we got our clothes, they were not our clothes, they were inmate clothes, and we were hungry, and we were very exhausted because we had no rest from the train trip, and we still had no food, and finally, that's how they brought us to the uh barracks in, in Birkenau, and uh, and, and we had the bunks. The bunks were out of uh 3 layers, the bottom, the middle and the top, and I uh received a top bunk, and there were about 14 people on each layer sleeping, and when one had to turn over, we all had to turn over because we were so packed and there was no room on, on, on the bunk to sleep, to make uh so that we could lay down. And, uh, uh, we were sleeping on straw mats, and the wooden planks, and the next day, they called us back to the uh Amplausing house, in the, where the showers were, and they uh, tattooed us, and that was really the registration that we went through. And, uh, they gave me a tattoo, and my number was A-5143, and uh, I have to go back because um, we were the fi-only 25th transport where they had given us this tattoo, and then the next day they called us back and scratched it out, and gave us that new number, because they made a mistake. Uh, I understand it was because those people were dead already, I was told, and they told us we should never answer our name, by our name, from now on we are uh this number, this is our name. And, I don't have to tell you the terrible feeling I had in my heart when at my age, of a girl of 15 years old, that you are told that your name is number, forget your name, you don't have a name anymore, that you had to shave it off, and you're hungry, and you have no clothes, and you're freezing, and your family is taken away. It was very hard for me to accept that (starts crying), and yet I don't know how I made it because I got a hold of myself, and I pushed all this behind me, and I says I have to live, and I

have to be strong, and at that young age, I felt like I was 90, I felt I had a lifetime already in those 2 days that I arrived in Birkenau. That was my first 2 days there with the rest of the inmates that made it with me because their families also went to the right, and we had decided the young girls that were left, that we should all stay together and try to survive together because our families were taken together to the ovens, so they said, "Let's us all stay together. Together we will be strong, and we will make it, we will lick them, they will not kill us, and we will come out and be free. Just let's hope till the war is ended, and, and that's what we tried to do, until we were deported from Auschwitz, but we, we stayed together all, and, and that gave us strength to survive.

Talk about volunteering for hard labor. Talk about some of the ways that you could take ----------to survive.

Well, we found out in Birkenau, that if you were idle, you were going to be taken by the trucks, and sent to the crematoria. So we volunteered any job that came up, and in the beginning when we, while we were in Birkenau, the uh, the jobs were very, very hard, and I don't know what they were trying to make us do, but we were carrying big rocks, tremendous stones, they told us to go from one hillside to the next with those rocks, and we had to carry them. We had no gloves, we had no working clothes, and we scratched our bodies from the scraping of the rocks and we carried them back and forth, and our backs and feet were aching us with no food, no water, and we did this all day long, and whoever fell and couldn't do it, they just whipped and the dogs were walking next to us, and one day a German officer came and told the block ----------, which is the woman in charge of the barracks, that he needed a group of people to work in a kitchen in another camp. And the Belgian girls I was with, we all decided to volunteer, and to uh try and uh be picked for that job. So, we stayed in the uh roll call, and uh, and we looked the German straight in the face, uh, funniest thing is that uh, uh in the, the, or inside of us, it, it, it told us when we should not look at the Germans or when we should look them straight in the face, and show them that that, here we are, we want that job, and instinct told us when to do that and when not to, so we looked him straight in the face, the German should pick us, and sure enough he took the whole row of those Belgian girls that we were with, and uh, and we were picked for that job. And, uh, because if we were going to continue to do this volunteer work in Birkenau with those rocks, we were going to die, and, and we thought any job would be better than that. And this is how we arrived in Auschwitz. And, um, Auschwitz was maybe 3-4 miles away from uh, Birkenau. I really have no idea how far it was, the distance, but that was a new camp that opened up, and we were put into ----------, which means "to be concentration camp." And we went into the kitchen. The old people who worked there uh showed us and taught us the uh, how to go and two, two girls were um were picked for each stove or uh kettle, which meant there was big tremendous room in that kitchen, and they had uh maybe

uh 25-30, I have no idea how many big ovens with uh, uh round big tremendous ovens, and we were supposed to do the cooking in them. And, um, we scraped those ovens, and we put the ovens on, and um, the fire, and uh, we had to make the soup, and then we had to make the coffee, and uh, the coffee w-and the food after we did it, we filled a big tremendous pail, uh, there were big army pails. We had to carry them out uh 2 by 2, and it was very, very heavy, and the labor was just as hard as those tremendous rocks that we were dragging, and I, I thought I was going to do, I, I cried myself to sleep every night because I thought I couldn't do that hard labor. First of all, I was so young and I,and uh malnutrition, but we thought when we , we heard kitchen, working in the kitchen, that we would have extra food, and that will give us strength, and, and, and we were trying to buy time to survive. But, sure enough, we got used to the hard work, and I learned to carry those hard big heavy buckets of pails, and carry them out into the camp so that the uh, uh inmates could carry them to their barracks, and uh, and this is how we worked there for about 4 or 5 months, in the kitchen with the Belgian girls.

----------(Sandy says something).

Changing film, camera roll 4 is up, sync take 5 is up.
Beep

Can you tell me about the transports, what you saw and what you knew about them, who came on them and what happened to them.

The transports in Auschwitz?

Yeah.

Transports were coming in day and night, constantly. The only thing that I knew of is the people that came into the camp, once they were in the camp, uh, they were, they were safe enough to live through until they were transported to another ca-camp, and each one of them was directed to different works to do in the, while they were in the camp. Once you had to go to the left, they were put on the truck. The children, the old people, the sick people, some people uh, they would whisper, the inmates who uh received us at the dock, at the, as we came off of the cattle wagon, they had taken inmates and, and to direct us what to do, put the packages down, stay in line, don't cry, don't do this, don't do that. Keep your child, they would say, they would whisper to us, nobody should see, give your child to an old lady, we didn't know what they were talking about, and some mothers wouldn't give up their children, so Dr. Mengele who told them to go to the right and the

left, would tell the mothers with the children to go to the left, and uh, and this is how uh there ended up in the trucks, and, and they were sent to the crematoria. The crematoria, there were 6 of them, that was burning day and night, and uh, at the end there was 5 because one was broken, and uh, when the trucks uh, was filled up with, with the people, the uh, they, we had our orchestra with uh inmates that they formed and the orchestra was accompanying the trucks with music while they drove off, so that, I presume, I don't know why, what the orchestra was doing there, but I presume, to make the people not scared or they shouldn't panic, and, and this is how they went to their death, with the music, going to the crematoria, saying that they were going to shower, and uh, and go into the concentration camp. They went in thinking they were going to take a shower, and uh, and go to the camp, but they were gassed and then burned. And this is what I found out when I came into, into the concentration camp, and how I worked there, and, and, and I knew all this was going on and, and one time, a transport of Hungarian people came, and I understand, I was told that these people had no food for 2 days, and they put them in 2 barracks, and they had no food, and they were going to send them to the crematoria. I don't know how uh ,uh, this was uh, uh told to me, but that was the word that was wor-went around in the camp, and they didn't know that. And, I felt so terrible for them, I felt like I had to do something to make, at least they shouldn't be hungry before they die, so I s--I made up my mind, I didn't tell anybody, I had made up my mind to steal a bucket of boiled potatoes because we always cooked one day in advance, and I filled that bucket up with potatoes, and at night, I risked my life because I could have been shot, we're not supposed to be out of the barracks at night, after a certain hour, and I went into one of--I snuck in to one to, one of those barracks, and quietly I gave a potato to each inmate in the beginning of the uh bunks, as I came in, and uh, not realizing, I, I started a terrible commotion because all of the sudden they found a potato in their hands, and so people started screaming, they wa-and ripping me apart, they wanted a potato because they hadn't had food for so long, and when I was almost half empty with the potato pail, the lights all of the sudden turned on, and the Block Eldester, which is the uh, the, I mentioned before, the uh, person in charge of that barrack. She says, "What are you doing here?" And, I got caught, so I said, "I'm giving some potatoes away to the people." She says, "Give me that pail. Do you know I could have you shot right now?" She says, "and get back to your barracks." So, she uh, she took the potatoes away from me, and I had to naturally leave and I was lucky that she didn't turn me over to the Germans, because I would have been terribly punished, or God knows what would have happened to me for what I did, not realizing how I could have really risked my life for to do something like that, but I felt so terrible knowing what was going to happen that these people were condemned, and that they were going to die, that I wanted to do something to, to, to help a little bit to do something, and, and, and, and the next day when I got up in the morning the 2 barracks was empty, and they were gone, and that was a terrible experience for me. The Gypsies went right away from the transport, they didn't even go into the camp, they sent them

right to the oven. And the old people like I said, and children, I understand, afterwards, that children up to 16 years were sent away. Luckily when I arrived in, in the camp, I always looked a little bit older because I was tall, and I was developed, and evidently Dr. Mengele made a mistake with my age, because uh, he probably thought I was older otherwise I would have gone to the ovens too. And uh, God was with me. That I survived that.

Talk about the suicides of those who gave up, and how you felt yourself and what you used to do.

Every once in a while ----------human beings, we have ups and down feelings. As much as we fought them and we tried to keep our morale up, but there were times where it was so low that we couldn't bear anymore, and we would break down, and being that we stuck together with the Belgian girls, there was so many different nationalities in the camp, it was a melting pot. There were Russians and Poles and Belgians and Frans, French and Holland and German people and Czechoslovakian and Hungarian, we were all mixed together, but each one of these different nations who, whoever they were formed little groups and they, and they were like little families, and this is what gave us the strength to go on and to push and to lift--to survive, so naturally, uh, every once in a while when somebody could not make it, we would get up in the morning and we would find one or two people who would end their lives at the wires, because the wires were electrocuted. It wasn't too often, but I did see about 3 or 4 in the in the time that I was in concentration camp in Auschwitz, that I did see about 3 or 4 dead people that were clung to the wires because they could not stand it anymore, and they had to end their lives. And, and one of those time, it w-it was my turn where I almost wanted to end my life because it, I was for hours standing in appel, that day. Appel means roll call, like you do in the army, and being that it was winter time in Auschwitz, it, it was a terrible cold. I don't know what the degree was but we were in, in constant uh, uh cold terrible weather, and everything was icy, and the, we were always in mud in Auschwitz, but that particular day we were standing on ice, and uh, we were standing for hours in appel because they uh was, there was one person that was missing, and not until they had the right count could we go into the barracks. And, uh, uh, I don't know what happened, we were standing there for hours in roll call, and I was turning blue, and I couldn't, I, the cold got to me, to my heart, and finally, after they let us go, I passed out. The girls were holding me while I was passed out because if I would have fallen down, that would have been the end of me. They would have dragged me away, and I would have gone on the wagon out from the camp and into the oven. So, they held me up, and when I came to, I was in the barrack. I was frozen. I was blue. Uh, they were working on me to massage me. Uh, we happened to be uh mixed with some Polish uh Christian people, and they, in, in the same barrack when I was working in the kitchen, and those people were at the end, and they had the better spots in the um barrack. They used to sit around the

oven because there was one long um brick uh chimney, I don't know how to call it, it was a long one, and at the end there was a little oven. That was supposed to heat the whole barrack, but they only had it on for maybe a 1/2 an hour in the morning and the rest of the, of the day it was cold, but the Polish people...

We've got to reload.

Beep.

The Polish people were also inmates, just like we were, but they had better um, um, they were not treated like the Jewish people were, and uh, they resented us there because, in a way they were antisemitic too, they didn't, they didn't like the Jews either, so they were knocking us around in, in, in the barracks. And, they always hovered over that tiny little oven, there was always uh, uh fightings going on because we wanted to warm us our ourselves also, and they would push us away, but when they brought me in, as much as they didn't like the Jews, for some reason, they uh, made room for me, and they uh, let me go near the oven so I should warm up, and they were working on me, and uh, uh, uh massaging me, so when I came to, I don't know what came over me, I was so, I was exhausted, I was cold, I was frozen, and I wanted to give up right there and then. I was terribly emotionally upset, and I started to cry, couldn't stop, and, and I wanted to end it right there, and I screamed that I was going to run to the wires, and naturally everybody stopped me, and uh, the next day I felt much better, and uh, and this is how we made it in in the camp of Auschwitz because when uh you were down, your friends tried to pick you and lift you up, and the next day it was my friend's turn, and then I worked on her, and tried, and helped her to bring her morale up, and this is how we survived, we played it day by day, we could never, we never knew what the next moment was going to bring, and we never knew if the next day or next hour we were going to be whisked away by the trucks with the Germans, and the dogs that would come in and chase us on those trucks, and, and then to the ovens. And, and that's, that's how we lived there. The 4 or 5 months that we lived there wasn't months, to us it was 5-10 years. To us every day was, was a year, that we lived through in, in, in Auschwitz, and in the camp.

Did any of you, or did you see any acts of resistance of any sort or sabotage?

No, I did not see any of that, but, I will answer your question. It was impossible for us to do this because we had no weapons. They had the weapons. They would shoot us like we were dogs, and uh, we had no weapons, we were weak, and you, you couldn't fight, fight an army with bare hands, but I feel that every day that we lived in concentration camp and we survived it, to me was a

heroism uh by itself, because we made it and we survived this terrible life we had there, and by resi--by this we resisted Hitler to show him that we are here to, to stay, and he could not finish the race of the, of the Jewish people, and I feel by that, we resisted. And, and, and it was very uh, uh, heroism right there and then, with our bare hands we, we, we tried to fight for our lives, and, and, I think that is your answer right there.

What about religious resistance? Was there religious resistance?

Well, some people were religious and there was no way we could uh, uh, uh, uh say prayers so we said it to ourselves, whoever was religious. Uh, the food was only a piece of dry bread and the soup, and the water that we could drink there which was nothing but rust anyhow, that came out of the spicket, but uh, uh , if anybody wanted to pray, so he said it to himself or, they laid in bed, in, in the bunks, and they prayed. Um, I myself, I questioned God because uh, I was very religious when, until I came into the camp...because my grandmother raised me and she was a orthodox old lady, and uh she made me say the prayers every morning, and um, when I came to camp and I saw what was going on, and I saw I was living in hell, I said, "Where is heaven?" and, and, and "Where is God? How can he see what goes on here, in this, in this terrible hell, and let it happen?" So, I questioned God, as young as I was, and, and, I was terribly hurt, and, and I says, "There must not be a God, otherwise that wouldn't happen." I was, I would sneak out of guar--out of the barracks at night in Auschwitz, and I was risking my life by doing that because we had towers, watchtowers with the Germans with the rifles, and if they would see something in a shadow they would shoot right away, but yet there were times when I had to be all by myself, and, and, and be with my own thoughts, and I would sneak out of the barracks when nobody knew, and ev--I thought everybody was sleeping, and I would go all the way in the back of the camp, and it, it, it seemed that I like that very much, to be by myself, and I would look up at the sky because I would feel, that was the only free thing I could look at, that was out in the open, above the wires, and I would talk to the stars, and I would say, "Where is God? Why does, is he punishing us like that? And, and how long will that go on?" And I would talk to the stars and I would say, "The stars are looking down at us in the camp, and they see what is happening, and the same stars are shining to the outside world, where people are free, and they can do what they want to do, and, and be happy, and live a wonderful life, and we live here in a hell, and we don't know from moment to moment if we're going to live or die, and, and, and not to be human beings, worse than animals. A dog is taken better care of than we are. And how come the free world is allowing all this, and is not stopping this terrible thing that goes on at this time of, of uh in civilization." And, and then, naturally the answers were never answered to me, and after I cried myself out real good, I would sneak back into the barracks, and life would start all over again in the morning with the terrible work that I had to face, and, and

hunger.

Tell me about the death march. How did that happen?

When Russia was coming close to Auschwitz, word came that we were going to be evacuated, and that is the, at that time , we were separated from the Belgian girls. The only, was one young lady which was one year younger from me. Her name was Christian. She was the only one that stayed with me, and I promised the rest of the girls that I was going to watch out for her. And, uh, and that's how we left the concentration camp of Auschwitz. And we started marching, and we marched for days, and, and uh, I have no idea how many days we marched, and also uh, a couple times we went into wagon cars again, and then, we had to get off of them, and start walking again, and it seemed that to each camp we arrived, they were already overfilled with people because they condensed the camps as the Russian were coming closer, and there was no room, and uh, we were just exhausted on the road because um, we had very little food, and we were just exhausted from walking, and a lot of people, while we were walking through Poland, we uh, tried to escape, thinking that they could speak the language, the Polish language, and they would run away, but we used to hear shots all through the marching as we were walking, we heard shots and we heard people being shot, and we saw how the people were falling in the ravines, ravines, in the ditches, behind trees, behind shrubs, on hills, it, it, it was like a war zone, with wounded people, and, and, and dead people all over on both sides of the roads, there were dead people who were trying to escape, and also for people who couldn't keep up with the march, because as we walked and we got exhausted, and our feet were killing us, and people were falling behind, and the Germans were shooting everybody who couldn't keep up with the death march, and this is the reason why they called that the Death March, because that so many people died on that road before they arrived into a concentration camp, and this is how I arrived in Bergen-Belsen from that death march.

Eleven seconds to run out.

Change film, camera roll 6 is up, sync take 7 is up.

Beep.

I want you to talk to me now about your friendship and your caring for Christian?? and what that gave you and what it gave her. I just want you to think back on how important that relationship was, and how it helped you or hurt you, whatever it did.

Christian was a very sweet young naive little girl. And, I actually grew close to her because of her uh, to me she was a young child, as young as I was, but I felt that she was a baby, and uh, I worried over her, and uh, she was my sister I didn't have that I lost. And, uh, she does not know why she was taken. I'll be very honest, I think they made a mistake with her. I think she didn't even have a Jewish name, I mean, Christian, I don't know of any family, of any Jewish family would know uh, would name a, a girl by that name because it's a gentile name, it's not a Jewish name. Anyhow, Christian does not know, did not why she was caught, she was picked up in the street, and uh, she didn't know why she was in camp, and she came from France, so we spoke French always, and she was very um, she was helpless, and I was the strong one, supposed to be (laughs), so I took care of Christian as much as I could, I watched over her. I urged her where she had to go to work with me, and uh, I was her mother, and maybe that, in turn, gave me the strength to go on, because I worried over her. Our, I kind of, uh realized that afterwards, I didn't see it at that time, and I didn't understand it, but afterwards, I put kind of 2 and 2 together, and thinking that because I worried over her, I had to be strong to watch over her, and that gave us the chance to survive as long as we could. And, so, that's how we were in Bergen-Belsen. I watched over her over the march, and urged her to keep on walking because she wanted to fall behind, and I knew she would be shot, so I kept pushing her. There were times where I was angry and scolded her, and that's how she kept up, but then at the end, towards the end of the liberation, before that, Christian got sick because Auschwitz, I mean Bergen-Belsen was just terrible. It was just the opposite of Auschwitz. In Auschwitz we had to work in order to survive, and in Bergen-Belsen we were sitting idle; there was no work there. And, the decay of the camp was terrible. The whole camp stunk and was dirty and was full of decay, and uh , typhus, and this is how Christian got sick and got the typhus and got delirious, and uh, one night she was so delirious she uh saw her parents in front of her eyes, and she jumped up from the ground because we were sleeping on the bare floors, and she saw her family and she started running to her family she thought, and she only was stepping on the sleeping people and made a whole big commotion, and I naturally tried to calm her down, and uh, while I was trying to calm her down, the uh, the woman in charge of the barrack came and with a stick started beating on me because I was making a commotion, we were not supposed to be speaking, it was supposed to be quiet at night, and she hit me so hard until the um stick was broken, and naturally I couldn't budge for 2 days. I was all broken up and bruised, and as sick as Christian knew she knew something was wrong and because she, she did not give me any problems those few days, and naturally Christian got worse and worse, and um, Christian died of Typhus in my arms. I was trying to nurse her with a teaspoon of sug, of uh, black coffee that I had gotten after standing for hours at, at the kitchen, maybe somebody would take pity on me and give me some coffee. I was hoping somebody would recognize me in the uh kitchen because I worked in the kitchen in Auschwitz, and um, it happened twice where somebody gave me a little bit of soup, and then one

time a little bit of coffee, and I would run back to the barracks, and, and feed it to Christian, but Christian could not make it, she failed me, and she died in my arms, and uh, when she died, I put her down, and I pretended she was asleep, and I covered her up because people knew that she was sick, and I did not tell that she was dead for after 2 days because I wanted to have her ration and her food, and I pretended she was asleep, and then I was afraid that they would discover that she was dead, and that she would start smelling, and uh, I told the uh, block eldester, the lady in charge that Christian died, and they uh took her away. They took her away in Bergen-Belsen they did not take the people and burn them or put 'em, or bury them, they just piled them up outside of the barracks in front of our door, and the pile was as high as 6 or 7 feet of corpses in, in front of each barracks we lived with the dead people, and this is where Christian was. And for days, I could not look at Christian because I knew she was laying there, and one day, my guilt was bothering me so because I knew she was there and I wouldn't look at her, I decided to go see her. And when I looked up at her, I saw Christian, but something worried me and puzzled me, and I didn't know what was wrong, and I said uh, somebody stole her skirt, and she was laying from waist down, naked as a skeleton, which they called in Au--in Bergen-Belsen was a musselman, which meant uh, before you died you were skin and bones, you looked like a musselman which was a skeleton, and she was a skeleton laying there, and she had a navy blue jacket, but the navy blue jacket wasn't blue, it was grayish or white, and it puzzled me, I says, why would somebody steal a skirt and change a jacket from a blue one to a white one, and not take everything and just leave it there, so I leaned over closer to the pile of the dead people, and there I saw that Christian blue jacket was covered with terrible lice. The lice was a big as the black ants that you see sometimes in ground, and they were just crawling all over Christian's body and the jacket, and, and that made that blue navy jacket white, and I couldn't take it anymore, I almost fell on the dead, on the dead people myself, I was in such shock. And I just ran away because I, I was in terrible shock, I, I, I saw the terrible lice eating her up, and it it was just too much for me to take, and I never looked at Christian again. And I was so disillusioned, and I was so in despair that to see that beautiful young girl who never even knew she was Jewish ended up in concentration camp and dying like that. (Cries) And then, I think that's when I gave up trying to fight for my life, and I came down with the typhus. And I was very, very sick, besides being sick with typhus, I had a terrible accident in, in the barracks at the end and I was bruised on my leg here, and my leg was on fire because it was like a terrible big bump that I had there, and my f--my foot was on fire; between my foot and, and the typhus and the fever, I almost died. And this is how the camp was liberated from that um, at, at that time, and um, they um picked me up and wrapped me up in a blanket, and they took me into the uh showers, and the inmates, the Germans that they caught, they made them uh put white uniforms on and, and they took care of the inmates who were very, very sick, who needed care right away, and they had built a hospital outside of uh, uh Bergen-Belsen to uh put those terrible sick people and to help them to

uh bring them back to health, and this is how they wrapped me up in a blanket and showered me and cleaned me, the German SS did that, and then brought me into that uh hospital, and uh, I understand, um, Canadian doctor who looked at my leg, and I could see in his face that my leg was terrible, and he said, uh, he had a translator, and in French, they told me they were going to try and save my leg, and um, afterwards I found out that I had gangrene in my leg, and he almost amputated that leg, and I was still fighting for 2 months in that hospital because I still had the typhus, and this is in the conditions that they found me. I don't know if I weighed 65 pounds when I was liberated, I was more dead than a live. And, maybe another week, I would have been gone, and I would have never survived it. And, it took me...

We just ran out.

Beep.

Can you talk about the things you remember from your senses, like smells, like sounds. Are there things vivid in your memory from those times??

Certainly, a few, uh, when we arrived in Auschwitz, it was always damp. The sun never shone there. It was never shining, I never, may-maybe if it, if I saw it maybe 2, 3 times was the most, in all the months I was there. It was always muddy and damp and the grounds were always covered full of mud. We smelled a terrible smell because of the ovens from the crematoria, and at certain times depending the weather, the climate, the winds, we all, all also would have ashes falling down on us. And when, tell you the truth, when Polish people say, who lived around Auschwitz, that they did not know, they wouldn't, when they denying, they say they did not know what went on in, in Auschwitz. I know they're lying because if we smelled it, I know they smelled the terrible flesh of the people being burned, and this is what I remember in Auschwitz, and that's why I say It was a living hell over there. I remember as a, as, as a young girl one time, seeing a terrible movie, and it looked like cave people living, and they were slaves, and they were living in caves, and for some reason, I compared Auschwitz with that movie because we lived instead of caves, it was Auschwitz, but we liv--we lived in uh in the mud like they did, and the fire and the ashes, and the grey color of uh, of the sky was down on us, they never saw the daylight. Neither did we. And, uh, I thought I was part of that movie, that uh, and, and that was hell to me. And I used to think, if I ever die, no matter how bad of a person I will be, which I don't think I am, but if ever I am going to be a bad person, and if there is a God, if he's going to punish me, I will never go to hell, because I'm living it already, I've been in hell, so I know I will go straight to heaven, I always used to think that, and to this day I really think that still because I've been there already. That's one of the

feelings that I have. Now, in Bergen-Belsen, the decay and the dirt and the dead people we lived with because there we lived with the dead people, and the terrible uh, terrible odor we lived with because there was no toilets there. They had made ditches, and we had to go in the ditches to uh, to urinate there, and to, to do our bowel movements, and it was never covered, and it stayed like this for months, and this is why people were dying like flies. And every day, there's not a day that doesn't go by even now, to this day, that there isn't something that reminds me of concentration camp. And if I go on a train, and if I go on a trip, and I hear the doors being slammed, I am back in the cattle wagons because I hear the motion of the trains, and I hear the doors being slammed together, and if I go for a joyful trip to New York for a wedding or a bar mitzvah or a show in the theater, and before we get into New York, and we get into New Jersey, and I see the, see the factories with the tall chimneys with the fires, I see the crematories. I will never forget that. I lived with the dead people all the time. I might laugh on the outside and I might have a good time, and the people don't know what goes on in my heart because I came from hell. And if I hear a siren, I'm back in Belgium, and I'm back in the basement trying to protect ourselves from the bombs.

But your same heart kept you alive in that hell, didn't it?

That same, because of my youth, I feel. The will to live, I was not ready to die, and I am the only one who survived of my whole family who went into concentration camp. I was the youngest, and I was the youngest that came out. And the reason I feel I am the one who survived was because of my youth. I had the strength to go on, and also because I was taken two years after my whole family was taken. My family was taken in 1942, I lost them all. And, I was taken in 1944. My aunt was unlucky, she had to go to the right, by Dr. Mengele, he told her to go to the light, t-to the right, and me to the left, and that's and this is why she, she died. And my uncle never, he was, he was taken to the men's camp, and I never heard of him afterwards. I had one more aunt that lived on in hiding in Belgium. My mother's sister. And, for some reason or another, when word came to me in Auschwitz when Belgium was liberated, I had made up my mind right there and then, I knew that my aunt Sarah was alive with her two children, and uh, I was so happy for her, but I cried myself to sleep in the bunk feeling sorry for myself that I was in Auschwitz. But, I did not stop to think and realize that God forbid, she could have been caught and sent to another camp. I didn't even want to think about that. And sure enough, when I was liberated, she found me in Belgium.

Talk about how important cleanliness was to you, and what kinds of things you did to try to keep clean under those awful conditions. Clean, very much I was not, to be very honest with you. In Auschwitz, I kept clean, very clean because we were able to shower as much as we knew that the same showers were giving gas to the people, but we were a little bit privileged because we worked

in the kitchen, and the German people are very clean, so they would order us to go every so often and shower in the showers, and we knew that we were going to be showered, so we were not scared, although you never knew what, what they had, kind of tricks they had up their sleeve, but we risked it. So, in Auschwitz it wasn't too bad for me to keep cleanliness, and for a piece of ration, I would exchange for a piece of soap, so I could wash and keep clean, but in Bergen-Belsen it was a different story. Bergen-Belsen was just terrible. I, I say even a animal, a dog, does, is, is cleaner. We, it was just terrible. The decay and the smell, and the odor that was going on, and we had no water to bathe, and there was uh, uh, there was a sink there with some um, the spickets at the barracks, which was, it, it the water was not even running fl-fluently, it was just drip, drip, drip. And you couldn't do nothing, you had to hold it like this to have a little bit of water, and then it was all red, it was all rusted because the pipes were all terrible rusted up. And, we, we couldn't wash, we couldn't bathe, and we were covered with lice, we just couldn't help it, and from the lice we got the terrible typhus and diphtheria, and from, this was a terrible sickness, we couldn't control it, and we had accidents and we couldn't wash ourselves, and this is how we lived. In this terrible conditions in Bergen-Belsen.

How do you want the people you lost to be remembered?

What can I tell you? How, how can you describe a whole family of 58 people or 60 I don't know exactly how many we were, who died in vain for nothing, only because of one reason, because they were Jews, who were not even, they did not even belong to a political party. They were minding their own business trying to make a living for their families, living in peace, a loving family in Belgium who worked hard to survive, not to be burdens to the country, and for no reason to be picked up middle the night and to be taken on trucks and trains and cattle cars and to be uh, uh, uh beaten up and, and, and then dying concentration camps in, in ovens, what do I tell my children? H-how, how can I describe my family that I dearly loved, and I was taken away from them at the age of 15, that young, to be left all alone. I'll be very honest with you, in the beginning when I got married, I was afraid to have children myself because I wa--I was afraid to bring them in this horrible world. And then I said to myself, "No, I have to show Hitler that he could not kill us all."

Let's just put one more roll on and finish this thought.

Beep.

I want you to go back to where you said, "I have to be honest with you, I didn't want to have children."

I didn't want to have children because I was afraid that another war would come one day, and that my children shouldn't have to live through the same thing I did, and then I said, "No, I have to show the terrible people who wanted to kill us all, that they cannot kill a race, and I have to build a new family because they took my family away. I have to have another new family growing, and our name sh-should go on in the future. They cannot finish us, and I decided to have children th-then. And, I have 3 beautiful sons, and when my sons were old enough to know what went on in the past, and how we lost, and why they ask me questions, "Where is my grandma and my grandfather?" and aunts and uncles, they didn't understand when they were tiny why they didn't have family. Little by little I told them. And I told them the experiences I had during the war, and why they don't have family, and I urged them, one day you will have a family, and you will tell your children what went on, and sure enough, my children know, and now their little children, my little granddaughter wants to know what my number on my arm is. And I tell her in no certain way, I cannot shock her too much, but I tell her, that it was from a camp where I was taken in detention, and I hope that in the near future, that all the schools and all the children will know, so that they can fight and to, to see that it should never happen again because it, it would be doomsday if it ever God forbid, happens again. When another war should come and try to kill everybody, just because they are a race. I'm not just saying Jews, but that they are against a race, it should never ever happen again.

Thank you. Now, before you get up, uh would you talk, her number is, her number, they made a mistake and they crossed it out.

(laughing)